

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

January 30, 2025

3:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Scott Kawasaki, Chair
Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Vice Chair
Senator Bill Wielechowski
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson
Senator Robert Yundt

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 64

"An Act relating to elections; relating to voters; relating to voting; relating to voter preregistration for minors at least 16 years of age; relating to voter registration; relating to the Alaska Public Offices Commission; relating to synthetic media in electioneering communications; relating to campaign signs; relating to public official financial disclosures; relating to the crime of unlawful interference with voting in the first degree; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 70

"An Act relating to regional educational attendance area elections; relating to terms for members of regional school boards; relating to voter residence; relating to voter registration; relating to the inclusion of voter registration forms in permanent fund dividend applications; relating to election administration; relating to ballot counting; relating to absentee voting; relating to early voting; relating to voting by mail; relating to publication of election pamphlets; and relating to confidential information in voter registration records."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 52

"An Act relating to the day on which ballots are counted in an election; relating to absentee voting; and relating to early voting."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

CS FOR HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 4 (RLS)

"An Act relating to the day on which ballots are counted in an election; relating to absentee voting; and relating to early voting."

- PENDING REFERRAL

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 64

SHORT TITLE: ELECTIONS

SPONSOR(s): RULES

01/24/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/24/25 (S) STA, FIN
01/30/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 70

SHORT TITLE: SCHOOL&ELECTION BDS; VOTING; ELECTIONS

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/24/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/24/25 (S) STA, FIN
01/30/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 52

SHORT TITLE: ABSENTEE BALLOTS

SPONSOR(s): HUGHES

01/24/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/24/25 (S) STA, FIN
01/29/25 (S) STA WAIVED PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE, RULE
23
01/30/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

DAVID DUNSMORE, Staff
Senator Bill Wielechowski
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of SB 64.

CAROL BEECHER, Director
Division of Elections
Office of the Lieutenant Governor
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of SB 70.

JAN HARDY, President
American Federation of State
County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Retirees
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation in support of SB 64.

KENDRA KLOSTER, Director
Government Relations
Alaska Federation of Natives
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation in support of SB 64.

MICHELLE SPARCK, Director
Get Out the Native Vote (GOTNV)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 64 and SB 70.

MICHAEL GARVY, Policy Director
Alaska Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 64

RANDY RUEDRICH, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 64 and SB 70.

DOROTHY SHOCKLEY, Policy Justice Legislative Lead
Native Movement
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 64.

DARLENE TRIGG, Vice President
Human Resources
Kawerak Inc.
Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 64.

BRITTANI ROBBINS, representing self
Wrangell, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 64.

EMILY LEAK, Executive Director
Alaska Voter Hub
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 64.

JACKIE BOYER, representing self
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 64.

SCOTT CRASS, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 64.

KAREN BUTTON, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 64.

SENATOR MIKE SHOWER, District O
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 64 with concerns.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:31:37 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:31 PM Present at the call to order were Senators Bjorkman, Wielechowski, Gray-Jackson, Yundt and Chair Kawasaki.

SB 64 - ELECTIONS

[3:34:27 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 64 An Act relating to elections; relating to voters; relating to voting; relating to voter preregistration for minors at least 16 years of age; relating to voter registration; relating to the Alaska Public Offices Commission; relating to synthetic media in electioneering communications; relating to campaign signs; relating to public official financial disclosures; relating to the crime of unlawful interference with voting in the first degree; and providing for an effective date."

[3:35:11 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI presented SB 64 on behalf of the Rules Committee, Senator Wielechowski, Chair. He stated that SB 64 began three years ago as a collaborative effort among lawmakers, including Chair Kawasaki, Senator Shower, and Representative Tuck, with input from the Governor's Office. He stated that despite strong support, it missed deadlines in the past two sessions due to drafting delays. He said SB 64 aims to:

- Clean up voter rolls—currently showing 106 percent more registered voters than adult residents
- Eliminate voting barriers like the absentee witness requirement
- Implement a ballot curing process
- Address issues like deepfakes and campaign transparency.

[3:37:32 PM](#)

DAVID DUNSMORE, Staff, Senator Bill Wielechowski, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented an overview of SB 64. He moved to slide 2, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB 64 is a Comprehensive Election Reform

Cleans up Alaska's voter rolls

Removes barriers to voting

Faster and more transparent results reporting

Ballot tracking barcodes for absentee ballots

Bans the use of undisclosed deepfakes to influence elections

Additional provisions to modernize Alaska's election laws

[3:38:04 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 3, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB 64 Includes Provisions from Bills Proposed by Republican, Democratic, and Independent Legislators in Recent Legislatures

32nd Legislature

- SB 39 (Sen. Shower)
- HB 66 (Rep. Tuck)
- HB 157 (Rep. Rasmussen)
- HB 267 (Rep. Schrage)
- HB 286/ SB 167 (Governor)

33rd Legislature

- SB 1 (Sen. Shower)
- SB 5 (Sen. Shower)
- SB 19 (Sen. Kawasaki)
- HB 37 (Rep. Schrage)
- HB 129 (House Judiciary)
- SB 138 (Senate State Affairs)
- HB 246/ SB 232 (Rep. Story/ Sen. Kawasaki)
- HB 358 (Rep. Cronk)

[3:38:19 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 4, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Voter registration list clean-up

In 2022 it was estimated that Alaska's voter registration list was equal to 106 percent of the adult population. Sb 64 streamlines the process of removing voters who have left the state.

Adds several indications of residency in another state to the list of factors that trigger notice and clarifies the definition of residency for voting.

Voters who do not verify their registration are moved to inactive status. Inactive voters will not appear on precinct registers although their votes will be counted, and their registration reactivated if they vote or request an absentee ballot.

[3:38:54 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 5, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Current Voter List Maintenance Process

- Every January DOE mails non-forwardable notices to voters who have not voted, updated their registration, or signed a petition within two general elections or who have had mail from DOE returned to sender
- If the voter does not respond confirming their address, DOE mails a second non-forwardable notice informing the voter that if they do not confirm their address within 45 days their registration will be inactivated.
- Inactive voters registrations are canceled completely if the voter does not vote or contact DOE within two general elections.

[3:39:55 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 6, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Expedited process under SB 64

- DOE will mail a single forwardable notice requesting voters confirm their address with 45 days
- SB 64 expands the number of voters who will be sent notices to include voters who there is evidence have claimed residency in another state
- This process remains in compliance with the requirements of the National Voter Registration Act

[3:40:22 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 7, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB 64 requires notices be sent when DOE learns a voter...

- Registers to vote in another state
- Receives a driver's license in another state
- Registers a vehicle in another state

- Receives public assistance from another state
- Serves on a jury in another state
- Obtains a resident hunting or fishing license from in another state
- Pays resident tuition for a public university in another state
- Receives a residential property tax exemption in another state
- Receives a benefit only available to residents of another state

[3:40:42 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 8, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Clarifies the definition of residency and process to challenge a voter's residency

This bill clarifies that a voter's residence is a place where they have a definite, articulable, and reasonable plan to return to whenever they are absent.

It also establishes that the presumption a voter's registered address is accurate can be rebutted by evidence that they reside at another location

[3:41:14 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 9, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Codifies a procedure for voters to cancel their registration

Currently the Division of Elections will cancel a voter's registration if they request, but it is not required by statute.

Voters would be allowed to cancel their registration in person or electronically.

The process for cancelling a registration would be posted at polling places.

[3:41:42 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 10, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB 64 removes barriers to voting

Repeals the witness signature requirement for absentee by mail ballots

Stops special needs ballots from being rejected because of mistakes by poll workers or representatives

Creates a ballot curing process

Requires secure ballot drop boxes be made available

Requires postage paid return postage for absentee by mail envelopes

Allows voters to register to vote within 30 days of the election

[3:42:23 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 11, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Repeals the witness signature requirement for by-mail ballots

- In the 2022 special primary election, 2,724 ballots were rejected because of a missing witness signature- 1.7 percent of all ballots cast.
- Witness signature rejections disproportionately affected rural Alaska and military voters.
- In District 38, 10.9 percent of all ballots cast were rejected for missing witness signatures in the 2022 special primary.
- In the 2024 general election, District 18, which is mostly Joint Base Elemendorf-Richardson, had more by mail ballots rejected than any other district.

- There is no indication of any misconduct with these rejected ballots.

[3:43:17 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 12, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The witness signature requirement provides no meaningful election integrity protection

- DOE has testified that they do not verify that witness signatures meet the statutory requirement that they be from a person at least 18.
- The Division accepts as valid any mark made in the witness signature portion of the envelope.
- There is no practical way for DOE to verify the identity and age of witnesses from other states and countries.
- The absentee by-mail envelope does not even provide space for the witness to print their name or provide their date of birth.

[3:43:56 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 13, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Alaska Law Generally Allows Self-Certification of Documents, and the Division of Elections Accepts Self-Certification of Petition Booklets

[3:44:35 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 14, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Creating a Ballot Curing Process

- Within 24 hours of receiving the ballot, the Division mails a deficiency notice with curing instructions.

- It the voter has a phone number on file, the Division will call and text them as well.
- The voter returns the cure form confirming they voted the ballot with a copy of their ID and a signature.
- The cure process may be done electronically.
- A properly cured ballot will be counted if it is otherwise valid.
- If the voter responds that they did not vote the ballot, it will be referred to the Attorney General.

[3:45:27 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 15, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

A voter will be able to cure their ballot, and have it counted if it would be rejected because:

The voter did not sign the ballot envelope.

The voter's signature cannot be verified.

The voter did not provide an identifier that can be verified.

[3:45:37 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 16 and explained the United States map showing 24 of the 50 states with ballots-curing provisions. He said blue states are yes and orange states are no.

[3:45:52 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 17, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Stop special needs ballots from being rejected because of mistakes by poll workers or voter representatives

- Currently special needs ballots can be rejected because of mistakes by poll workers or voter representatives.
- In the 2024 general election 5.7 percent of special needs ballots were rejected, compared with only 1.8 percent of by-mail ballots.
- Special needs rejections are especially high in rural Alaska, with 37.5 percent of special needs ballots in District 40 being rejected.
- Often one volunteer will deliver special needs ballots to all residents of a senior living facility, so if this person is not properly trained an entire facility could have their votes rejected.

[3:46:50 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 18, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Requires secure drop boxes be provided for by-mail ballots

- Secure drop boxes were offered in 2020 and 2022 but not 2024, resulting in voter confusion.
- Drop boxes would be required, if practicable, at Division of Elections offices, and within municipalities of at least 20,000 people.
- There would be at least one drop box for every 20,000 residents.
- The division shall establish criteria for choosing drop box locations by regulation.

[3:47:22 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 19 and showed an example of what a return postage envelope for an absentee ballot will look like.

[3:47:29 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 20, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Allows voters who register within 30 days of an election to vote

Currently a voter must register in the state and district in which they are voting 30 days before the election.

This means an Alaska resident who moves within 30 of the election might not be able to validly vote in any district.

The Division already conducts same day registration for presidential elections, but these votes are only counted for president.

Voters registering within 30 days will only be able to vote absentee, early, or questioned ballots which will be reviewed to ensure the voter is eligible.

[3:47:50 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 21, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Ballot tracking system for absentee ballots.

The Division already offers ballot tracking to allow voters to check whether their ballot has Ballot tracking system for absentee ballots been counted, this bill requires tracking barcodes to allow ballots to be tracked in the mail.

Voters can check the status of their ballot online and see whether it has been counted or rejected.

This bill requires a multi-factor authentication system to protect voters' privacy

[3:48:13 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 22, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB 64 provides faster more transparent reporting election results

Begin scanning absentee ballots before Election Day.

Providing ranked choice voting tabulations when unofficial results are released.

Providing information about which ballots are included in unofficial results allowing the public to know what ballots have been counted and which ballots are remaining.

[3:48:42 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 23, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Begin scanning absentee ballots 7 days

Under current law, DOE cannot scan absentee ballots until the polls close on Election Night

SB 64 will allow election results to be available earlier by having the scanning of absentee ballots begin seven days before Election Day.

Tabulated results will not be released until the polls close at 8pm on Election Day.

[3:49:02 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 24, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Adopt best practices for reporting ranked choice voting results

This bill adopts the national best practices identified by the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center requiring unofficial ranked-choice tabulations be released along with the unofficial first round results.

This will provide greater transparency throughout the counting process and reduce confusion about results.

[3:49:28 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 25, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Requires transparency for unofficial results

Which Election Day precincts have been counted

Which districts, days, and count codes of absentee ballots have been counted

Which precincts and count codes of questioned ballots have been counted

Count and reject code data for absentee ballots reviewed

[3:49:57 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 26, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Clarify rules for poll watchers and ballot review observers

Currently statutes only provide for observers for political parties, candidates, initiatives, referenda, and recalls at polls and counting centers, and only parties may observe the State Review Board.

This provision clarifies that candidates, ballot measure, and ballot question campaigns may have observers at polls, counting centers, and the State Review Board.

Ballot questions include constitutional amendments, judicial retention, bond propositions, and advisory votes.

This bill also clarifies that campaigns may have observers at all tables where ballots are being reviewed within a counting center.

[3:50:55 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 27, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Clear rules for challenging ballot review decisions

Currently it is unclear how long campaigns have to file a challenge, and campaigns often have to negotiate this with the regional counting centers.

This bill requires regulations to explicitly address the challenge process.

These regulations must allow a reasonable time to submit a challenge.

[3:51:15 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 28, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Allows additional risk limiting audits

- Allows DOE to adopt regulations to adopt additional audit procedures to ensure integrity and accuracy of final results.
- The State Review Board reviews all results before certification, including hand counting one precinct per district, but current law limits the scope of this review.
- Campaigns will be able to observe the State Review Board process.

[3:51:46 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 29, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Cybersecurity program

- Requires the division to adopt regulations for a cybersecurity program to protect records from hackers and data breaches.
- The program will include cybersecurity training for elections officials.

[3:52:04 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 30, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Synthetic Media

- Prohibits the use of undisclosed synthetic media (commonly known as "deepfakes") to influence elections.
- It also provides that someone defamed by an election related deepfake may seek injunctive relief.
- Any electioneering communication that uses synthetic media must include a disclosure statement: "This image/video/audio) has been manipulated."

"Synthetic media" means an image, audio recording, or video recording of an individual's appearance, speech, or conduct that is manipulated by artificial intelligence in a manner that creates a realistic but false image, audio recording, or video recording procedures.

[3:52:35 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 31, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Repeal the requirement for Alaska Public Offices Commission (APOC) to have offices in every Senate district

- Current law requires the Alaska Public Offices Commission to have offices in every Senate district.
- They have never had the funding level to meet this requirement.
- This bill replaces this requirement with a requirement that they make reports available on their website.

[3:53:05 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 32, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Codifying the ACLU of Alaska v. State of Alaska
Settlement Terms**

Alaska's billboard law bans advertising along state roads. In a 2018 settlement the state agreed not to enforce this ban against political signs 32 square feet or smaller on private property if the sign is not in a highway right of way or displayed for compensation.

This provision updates the statutes to codify these settlement terms.

[3:53:29 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 33, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Require Public Official Financial Disclosures for
Redistricting Board Members**

- Redistricting Board members would be added to the list of officials who must file public official financial disclosures with APOC.
- Financial disclosures allow the public to know of any potential conflicts of interest.
- Dozens of boards already require financial disclosures.

[3:53:47 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 34, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Clarifies the Open Meetings Act applies to the
Redistricting Board**

- The OMA requires public notice for meetings and that decisions be made in public.

- In two different redistricting cycles, courts have ruled against the board's argument that it was not subject to the OMA.
- This will make it crystal clear in statute that the board must follow the OMA.

[3:54:17 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 35, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Allows voters to request to continue to sign up to receive absentee by-mail for future elections

- The Division currently allows this for military and overseas voters.
- This bill would allow voters to continue to receive by-mail if they vote at least once every four years.
- Every absentee ballot returned will continue to be reviewed to ensure it is valid.

[3:54:46 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE moved to slide 36, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Codify language assistance requirements.

- Federal law requires the state to provide language assistance for voting in certain languages.
- Currently Alaska aids in 10 indigenous languages and dialects as well as Tagalog. (Spanish is no longer a language that is aided.).
- This bill requires that voters be able to request that election materials be mailed to them in any language for which the state is required to aid.
- Information about the availability of language at polling where language assistance is available.

[3:55:50 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON asked whether the state has a requirement to have an Alaska Public Offices Commission (APOC) office in each Senate district.

[3:56:16 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE responded yes, it's in statute to have an office in each Senate district but not enough funding has been provided to support it.

[3:56:49 PM](#)

SENATOR YUNDT asked how individuals creating deepfakes can be identified if the deepfake remains undisclosed.

[3:57:23 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE replied that SB 64 allows someone who's been defamed to seek injunctive relief by filing a complaint through the Alaska Public Offices Commission (APOC), which can then issue a fine for the violation.

[3:58:09 PM](#)

SENATOR YUNDT asked Mr. Dunsmore to give an educated guess on the fiscal note.

[3:58:21 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE responded he didn't know but the division has submitted a fiscal note.

[3:58:34 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI stated there is a fiscal note in the packet that's been submitted by the division.

[3:58:54 PM](#)

SENATOR YUNDT asked whether its normal for a bill, like SB 64, to go straight to the Finance committee without going to the Judiciary committee.

[3:59:18 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE stated his belief that in previous legislatures election bills were referred to the State Affairs Standing Committee and Finance, but did not receive a referral to the Judiciary Standing Committee.

[3:59:54 PM](#)

At ease

SB 70-SCHOOL&ELECTION BDS; VOTING; ELECTIONS

[4:01:00 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the meeting. and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 70 "An Act relating to regional educational attendance area elections; relating to terms for members of regional school boards; relating to voter residence; relating to voter registration; relating to the inclusion of voter registration forms in permanent fund dividend applications; relating to election administration; relating to ballot counting; relating to absentee voting; relating to early voting; relating to voting by mail; relating to publication of election pamphlets; and relating to confidential information in voter registration records."

[4:01:44 PM](#)

CAROL BEECHER, Director, Division of Elections, Office of the Lieutenant Governor, Anchorage, Alaska, presented an overview of SB 70. She moved to slide 2.

[Original punctuation provided.]

Division of Elections Mission

To ensure public confidence in the electoral process by administering voter registration and elections with the highest level of professional standards, integrity, security, accuracy, and fairness.

[4:04:01 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 3, and paraphrased the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Regional Educational Attendance Area (REAA) Elections

- Regional Educational Attendance Area (REAA) - an educational area that is established in an unorganized borough of the state
- Each REAA is governed by a locally elected regional school board
- REAA elections are held annually
- DOE oversees the entire election process for REAAs, including candidate filings, voter information dissemination, and the conduct of the elections themselves

- SB 70 proposes to shift REAA elections to occur biennially in odd-numbered years and change board members' terms

MS. BEECHER stated that the process will be implemented in stages. She emphasized that anyone currently holding a seat will retain it. As each term expires, that seat will be up for election to a four-year term.

[4:04:59 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 4, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Residence of Voter AS 15.05.020

- The residence of a person is that place in which the person's habitation is fixed, and to which, whenever absent, the person has the intention to return
- A change of residence is made only by the act of removal joined with the intent to remain in another place
- A person does not lose residence if the person leaves home and goes to another country, state, or place in this state for temporary purposes only and with the intent of returning
- A person does not gain residence in any place to which the person comes without the present intention to establish a permanent dwelling at that place
- SB 70 proposes to remove the "intent to return" language for purposes of determining a voter's residence

[4:06:32 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 5, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

PFD Automatic Voter Registration

- Beginning in 2016, eligible PFD applicants who otherwise meet voter qualifications are automatically registered to vote

- The PFD division sends this information to DOE
- DOE sends notices to all applicants who will either become newly registered voters or will have their Alaska residence address updated from their PFD application
- Applicants must respond within 30 days to opt out; if not, they are automatically registered to vote
- Newly registered voters will be registered as undeclared
- All voters who are newly registered or have updated their address will receive a new voter card in the mail
- SB 70 proposes to eliminate PFD automatic voter registration

[4:07:21 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 6, PFD Automatic Voter Registration, and stated that the date shows the annual cost to the state since the program's implementation in 2017. She said the cost to administer the program continues to rise, while the number of new voters who vote as a result of the service remains very low.

[4:07:51 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON asked what percentage of voters are registered to vote through the PFD program. She stated that she was concerned that taking away the PFD automatic voter registration program will limit the amount of people that vote.

[4:08:30 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER replied that footnotes [on the website] provide clarity to data on the chart as follows:

Existing Voters 1 - voters sent notices after changing their Alaska address

Existing Voters 2 - voters returned the notice to decline the address change

Existing Voters 3 - voters already registered in Alaska

New Voters Who Voted 4 - voters that were new who voted

MS. BEECHER added that Ambiguous Voters are voters that have unclear information such as similar names or addresses. When information is ambiguous the department sends the voter a new registrant opt-out notice.

[4:09:45 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 7, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Voter Registration List Maintenance

FIRST NOTICE

- At least once a year, DOE reviews the statewide voter registration list and sends notices by non-forwardable mail requesting confirmation or correction to all voters:
 - Whose mail from the division has been returned to the division in the last two years
 - Who have not contacted the division in the last two years, or
 - Who have not voted or appeared to vote in the last two general elections

SECOND NOTICE

- DOE sends a second notice by forwardable mail to the voter's last known address if:
 - The first notice is returned as undeliverable, and the voter has not, within the preceding four years
 - Contacted DOE, or
 - Voted or appeared to vote in any election
- The second notice states that the voter's registration will be inactivated unless the voter responds to the notice within 45 days.

MS BEECHER said voters are inactivated for the following reasons:

- Registration in another state
- Felony conviction in Alaska of moral turpitude
- Written request
- Death

- Through the division list maintenance process

[4:10:59 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 8, and read the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Voter Registration List Maintenance

SB 70 proposes to:

- Eliminate the step of sending the first notice
- Add two additional conditions prompting notice to voters who, in the two years, immediately preceding the review of the voter registration list
 - Became ineligible to receive a PFD, or
 - Received a driver's license in another state
- These changes will make the list maintenance process more efficient and timelier.

[4:11:43 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 9, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Early Voting Timeframes

- Currently:
 - Early Voting takes place 15 days before an election and on election day only at locations with a secure connection to the DOE Voter Registration & Election Management System
 - Early Votes are sequestered once the polling place registers are printed
 - Sequestered Early Votes are reviewed by election boards before they are counted
- SB 70 ends Early Voting five days before election day

- This minimizes the possibility for a voter to double-vote
- Voters may still vote absentee in person and special needs ballots during this timeframe

[4:13:20 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 10, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Ballot Receipt Timeframes

- Currently, all ballots returned by mail must be postmarked on or before the date of the election
 - Primary Election ballots must be received no later than the 10th day after the election
 - General Election ballots must be received no later than the 10th day after the election when mailed within the U.S. and its territories and no later than the 15th day after the election when mailed from outside the U.S.
- SB 70 proposes that all ballots be received on or before election day to allow for more immediate results, increase administrative efficiency, and bolster public confidence

[4:14:21 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 11, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

By-Mail Voting

- SB 70 proposes to expand options for by-mail elections by allowing them to be held in communities with populations of 750 or less
- All registered voters in a by-mail community will receive a ballot, eliminating the requirement for registered voters to request an absentee ballot

- This can benefit communities where polling locations and poll workers are challenging to secure

[4:15:05 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 12, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Official Election Pamphlet (OEP)

- DOE prints and mails official election pamphlets to each registered voter household before:
 - Each state general election, and
 - Each state primary, special, or special primary election at which a ballot proposition is scheduled to appear on the ballot
- 2024 Costs: \$844,855 to print and mail the OEP
- SB 70 proposes to remove the requirement to mail the OEP to save costs and reduce waste

MS. BEECHER stated that the OEP will be available online.

[4:15:55 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 13, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Addition Changes Proposed by SB 70

- Eliminates the size and number specifications for voting booths
- Removes the requirement that compensation for Election Board Members be set through administrative regulations
- Provides for postage-paid return envelopes
- Prohibits rejection of Special Needs ballots due to a mistake made by a representative

- Expands the definition of "mail service" to include delivery of materials by optical scanning and email
- Allows the Absentee Review Boards to begin reviewing absentee certificates (envelopes) sooner
- Removes the requirement to count late-arriving ballots during a recount

[4:18:12 PM](#)

SENATOR YUNDT asked how many states participate in Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC).

[4:18:30 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER guessed 24 or 25 states.

SENATOR YUNDT asked when the piece of legislation would need to pass a bill for it to apply to next year's election.

MS. BEECHER answered that the legislature would need to pass a bill during the current session for the legislation to apply to the 2026 election.

SENATOR YUNDT stated he is opposed to removing five-day early voting. He asked whether people are double voting and how many are there.

MS. BEECHER responded she doesn't know how many people double vote but when the Division of Elections sees evidence of such activity, it refers the matter to the Department of Law. Early votes are sequestered to prevent this, but that it also delays counting until voter history is verified.

INVITED AND PUBLIC TESTIMONY FOR SB 64 and SB 70

[4:22:09 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced invited testimony on SB 64 and SB 70.

[4:23:12 PM](#)

JAN HARDY, President, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Retirees, Anchorage, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 64. She said AFSCME strongly supports four issues of SB 64. She stated them as follows:

- targeted voter cleanup is essential for maintaining a clean and accurate voting system.

- create a more secure, modern, and transparent election process.
- current witness signature requirement.
- voter registration reforms

[4:25:52 PM](#)

KENDRA KLOSTER, Director, Government Relations, Alaska Federation of Natives, Anchorage, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 64 and paraphrased the following:

[original punctuation provided.]

The Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) is the largest statewide Native organization in Alaska including a membership of 174 federally recognized Tribes, 154 village corporations, 9 regional corporations and 9 regional nonprofit and Tribal consortiums.

In 2024's general election, 512 ballots were rejected due to missing signatures at a rate of 8 percent.

Districts 38, 39, and 40 suffered the highest number of rejected ballots due to the witness provision at a rate of 14 percent

[4:26:32 PM](#)

MS. KLOSTER continued with her testimony.

I want to highlight some important voting reforms we need to pass this year:

- **Rural Liaisons** - we need more assistance in rural Alaska during elections and ahead of elections to ensure all our communities have the information and equipment they need to run elections. We have had issues every year in communities across Alaska - and while our organizations like AFN are able and willing to help, and we do partner with DOE and talked with them through the election AFN has always been a strong supporter of ensuring every Alaskan - rural and urban - have the same opportunities to make their voices count in every election.
- **Stats for Voting:**

-In 2022's all VBM special primary, 7,500 ballots were rejected for the following reasons:

- No witness signature 2724
- Ballot postmarked after election day 1897
- No identifier provided 1556 rural Alaska lack postal services and limited post office hours.

- **Ballot Curing** - more than 30 states have a ballot curing provision, we understand that mistakes can happen and allowing voters to correct those mistakes and allow their ballot to be counted is the fair way to address this. Just tossing out their ballot is not serving Alaskans.
- **Removing Witness Signature** - in multiple hearings, including one in state affairs just this year, it was stated that the division of elections does not verify witness signatures on the ballot, yet hundreds of voters have had their ballots discarded. This is silencing Alaskans voice over a policy that is not even reviewed or followed in any particular manner. The voter already signs their ballot stating they are a resident and are allowed to vote.

[4:28:16 PM](#)

MS. KLOSTER continued with her written testimony.

- **Electronic Signature** - this is a provision that has been worked on with other division directors to get included to remove additional steps to register to vote. At this time, those who have a DL or ID through DMV they can register and use electronic signatures on file, but if you do not have a DL or ID then additional steps of printing off the forms, signing and mailing back in. Many places in rural AK do not have access to DMV.
- **Language Access** - Alaska has some of the most diverse districts in the nation, and many parts of Alaska where English is not the primary language which includes a large Yupik population. We must ensure additional measures are taken to strengthen language assistance and we appreciate

the bill recognizes this and hope we can work with DOE to ensure more measures are taken.

- **Same Day Voter Registration**
- **Permanent Absentee Voting** - this is a way to remove unnecessary application for an absentee ballot each year as many voters may vote by mail each year, and the provision already has a safeguard to ensure that voters do not stay on this list if they stop voting.
- **Ballot Drop Boxes** - increasing access, more ways to drop ballots off securely, and making it easier for voters.

I would like to caution legislators on measures that will limit voting access especially thinking about the challenges in rural Alaska, some of these include (which are included in the governor's bill):

- **Not allowing ballots to be counted after election day.** The mail in rural Alaska is often slow, not to the fault of any Alaskan, but to the nature of the remoteness of our communities, the inability to have reliable service, and continued hardships on the ability to even keep post offices opened in some areas. There must be flexibility to take into account the many rural villages across our state and allow time for ballots to be mailed back and counted. Alaskans should not be penalized and not be able to exercise their constitutionally protected right to vote.
- Immediate results are not as important in making sure that all Alaskans have their votes counted.
- **Support AVR** - AFN has passed resolutions supporting AVR, this is an important provision to keep. We do not need make it harder to register to vote - AVR has proven to be effective and useful, please do not roll this provision back.

We need to be taking more measures and actions to increase access to voting including the provisions mentioned and increasing poll worker training, Div of Elections (DOE) outreach to rural areas and building stronger partnerships between DOE and Tribes, increase

opportunities for early voting - every community should have the opportunity to early vote, more polling locations such as at medical centers - ANTHC/SCF is a hub for many communities and even residents of Anchorage, we should have a voting location here that is easy and accessible.

[4:31:29 PM](#)

MICHELLE SPARCK, Director, Get Out the Native Vote (GOTNV), Anchorage, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 64 and SB 70. She stated she has worked as a director for two election cycles or five elections. She stated that tribal IDs weren't mentioned as valid ID forms in either bill and limiting automatic voter registration to the DMV excludes many that can't access the DMV. She said the PFD process reaches nearly everyone across the state and removing registration maybe cut costs, but it cuts access. She mentioned in 2022 some villages had no meaningful access to vote in statewide elections and other ballots arrived to late to count, post office dependencies block voting and communication and will cause recurring issues in rural Alaka.

[4:36:41 PM](#)

MS. SPARCK continued with her testimony.

She stated that she supports the following for SB 64:

- allows same day registration
- pre-registering 16 year olds
- adding rural community liaison to ease burdens on rural supervisors
- language assistance
- early vote count
- postage paid on return envelopes for absentee ballots
- special needs accommodation
- ballot tracking system
- more drop boxes

She stated few concerns of SB 64 are:

- communities under 750 as permanent voting site could help reduce high rejection rates in vote by mail experiences, rural areas have a large rejection rate, and postal and weather issues.
- ballot curing process

[4:39:01 PM](#)

MICHAEL GARVY, Policy Director, Alaska Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Anchorage, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 64 and read the following testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

I want to focus on the provision to establish a ballot curing system. This is especially important in light of a ruling last Friday in a lawsuit we and partners filed in 2022, when thousands of ballots were rejected for minor errors in the all-mail primary. The Alaska Superior Court disagreed with our argument that, in the absence of explicit legislative direction, the Alaska Constitution requires the Division of Elections to implement a notice-and-cure system.

While an appeal is still possible, the written decision makes clear that the legislature must act to establish a ballot curing system. Ballot curing would address real problems. In November, more than 1,300 absentee ballots were rejected. Most of those were rejected for, essentially, administrative or inadvertent mistakes.

Additionally, a ballot curing system would not be a radical policy change. The Division said in litigation that it could administer an election including notice-and-cure without increasing voter fraud, and never claimed that implementing such a system would be overly burdensome. In fact, the state already provides notice to voters that their ballots were rejected; it only does so after an election has occurred.

Finally, ballot curing would help Alaska better uphold our fundamental voting rights and improve the integrity of our elections. During litigation, Division officials agreed that providing notice-and-cure might actually increase voter confidence because they know every eligible vote will be counted.

Ballot curing never allows an ineligible voter to vote in an election. It simply gives eligible voters a chance to prove that they are qualified, and for our election results to better reflect the will of the people. In a state where voting is the cornerstone of our democracy, this is essential.

We urge the committee to advance SB 64 because it includes this and other critical provisions that will help ensure the voting rights of Alaskans and improve the integrity of our elections.

[4:41:28 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on SB 64 and SB 70.

[4:41:51 PM](#)

RANDY RUEDRICH, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 64 and SB 70. He stated that SB 64, Section 2 is troubling. The language is overly broad and solves one issue by creating another. He urged against extending it to say, "present residence." He thinks the litigation in the 3rd and 4th circuits will require ballots to be received by Election Day, eliminating the current 15-day grace period. He suggested absentee in-person ballots should be received by the clerk by Election Day. He said the state of Alaska should continue using written signatures to ensure election security.

[4:44:49 PM](#)

MR. RUEDRICH continued his testimony stating SB 64, Section 30 raises concern. He stated his belief that voting results shouldn't be shared before polls close. He is concerned with the proposed cure process; it doesn't address the real issue. He stated that rushing to fix a vague issue may create bigger problems. He said that drop boxes don't significantly impact early, in-person absentee, or out-of-state voting, which makes up about a third of absentee mail-in and online ballots. He criticized the section on synthetic media, stating neither federal nor state governments have established rules on it and warns against premature legislation. He suggested not including the redistricting board in these proposals, noting it functions like a quasi-judicial body and are treated like courts and the legislature, which are exempt from open meetings laws.

[4:48:56 PM](#)

DOROTHY SHOCKLEY, Policy Justice Legislative Lead, Native Movement, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of SB 64. She stated that she supports removing the witness requirement for ballot signatures. She emphasized the importance of allowing voters to correct ballots and support same-day registration, particularly where internet and mail access are limited. She highlighted serious postal service issues in rural Alaska, citing 77 staffing vacancies in 2023. She advocated for accepting tribal IDs since many rural residents lack access to state ID services. She said community liaisons are recommended

to support absentee and early voting, which remains inaccessible in many rural areas.

[4:53:32 PM](#)

DARLENE TRIGG, Vice President, Human Resources, Kawerak Inc. Nome, Alaska testified in support of SB 64. She reiterated the testimony from Ms. Shockley.

[4:55:39 PM](#)

BRITTANI ROBBINS, representing self, Wrangell, Alaska testified in support of SB 64. She reiterated the testimony from Ms. Shockley.

[4:59:03 PM](#)

EMILY LEAK, Executive Director, Alaska Voter Hub, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 64. She paraphrased her written testimony as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The Alaska Voter Hub is a coalition of 22 Alaska-based nonprofits and community groups working together to strengthen democracy through the collective power of voting. With a diverse group of partner organizations, the Voter Hub has a broad statewide reach of tens of thousands of Alaskan voters. Through voter engagement and non-partisan education we empower Alaskans in every community to participate in elections at every level. Our work aims to address any undue barriers facing Alaskans at the ballot box creating a voting system that is fully accessible to all Alaskan voters. We seek to ensure that all eligible Alaskans – whatever their political persuasion – can exercise their right to vote and that all valid votes are counted. We believe that if all eligible Alaskans are able to exercise their right to vote, the democratic process can flourish.

We are writing to express our support for SB-64, the elections omnibus bill that expands voting rights and voting access for Alaskan voters. These improvements to Alaska's election system stand to increase access to voters who have historically faced undue barriers to accessing their right to vote and remedies to these known challenges are long overdue.

[5:00:00 PM](#)

MS. LEAK continued with her testimony.

The Voter Hub Policy Working Group has highlighted the following provisions as critical needed improvements to Alaska's election systems:

- The removal of the witness signature requirement

The witness signature requirement is an unnecessary element of absentee ballots. Given that the state does not verify signatures, this requirement is an unnecessary and outdated step that disempowers Alaskan voters. This was evident in the 2022 statewide primary election that was conducted by mail, when thousands of votes were not counted due to missing signatures, and again in the 2024 general election with over 500 ballots being rejected. Removing this requirement would simplify the process and allow eligible voters the opportunity to more seamlessly cast their ballots by mail, and to ensure that their valid vote is counted.

- The addition of a ballot curing process

Allowing voters the opportunity to fix honest mistakes made when casting their ballot by mail ensures that all Alaskans have equitable access to the voting process, regardless of where they live. The 2022 vote-by-mail special primary election is evidence that the lack of a ballot curing process has disenfranchised Alaskan voters. In this election, nearly five percent of ballots were rejected, and rejection rates were higher in precincts with greater percentages of minority voters. Many of these ballots were rejected because the voter identifier did not match the voter record, no identifier was provided, or because a voter did not sign the ballot. Establishing a system that gives voters an opportunity to cure – most notably a system whose timeline and mechanics works for all Alaskan voters, gives these voters the opportunity to fully exercise their right to vote.

- Establishing same-day voter registration

Allowing voters to register on election day has shown to increase voter turnout overall and is especially beneficial to transient populations and young and low-

income voters. By allowing voters to register to vote and update their registration up-to and on election day, creates a voting system that is more accessible and more equitable to Alaskan Voters and modernizes the states systems to be aligned with 23 other states and Washington DC. While Alaska allows for same day registration when casting a ballot for presidential candidates, expanding this opportunity to include statewide elections further empowers Alaskan voters.

[5:02:09 PM](#)

JACKIE BOYER, representing self, Eagle River, Alaska, testified in support of SB 64. She reiterated the above testimonies.

[5:04:36 PM](#)

SCOTT CRASS, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of SB 64. He reiterated the above testimonies.

[5:07:01 PM](#)

KAREN BUTTON, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 64. She appreciated the bill's focus on rural Alaska and its efforts to expand voter access rather than restrict it. She expressed pride that Alaska aimed to improve access through same-day registration, ballot curing, prepaid postage, and electronic signatures. She also supported keeping PDF registration and opposed requiring ballots to arrive by Election Day, as in SB 70. She urged allowing formerly incarcerated people to vote.

[5:10:05 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI kept public testimony open for SB 64 and SB 70.

[5:10:46 PM](#)

SENATOR MIKE SHOWER, District O, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, testified with concerns of SB 64 as written. He emphasized SB 64 focuses heavily on access, which Senator Shower supports, but said it lacks security measures like voter roll cleanup, ballot tracking, and watermarking. He stated his belief that the bill needs better balance. He stated that in the past election bills were assigned 3 committees not 2 like SB 64.

[5:13:58 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SB 64 and SB 70 in committee.

[5:15:25 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee,
Chair Kawasaki adjourned the Senate State Affairs Standing
Committee meeting at 5:15 p.m.